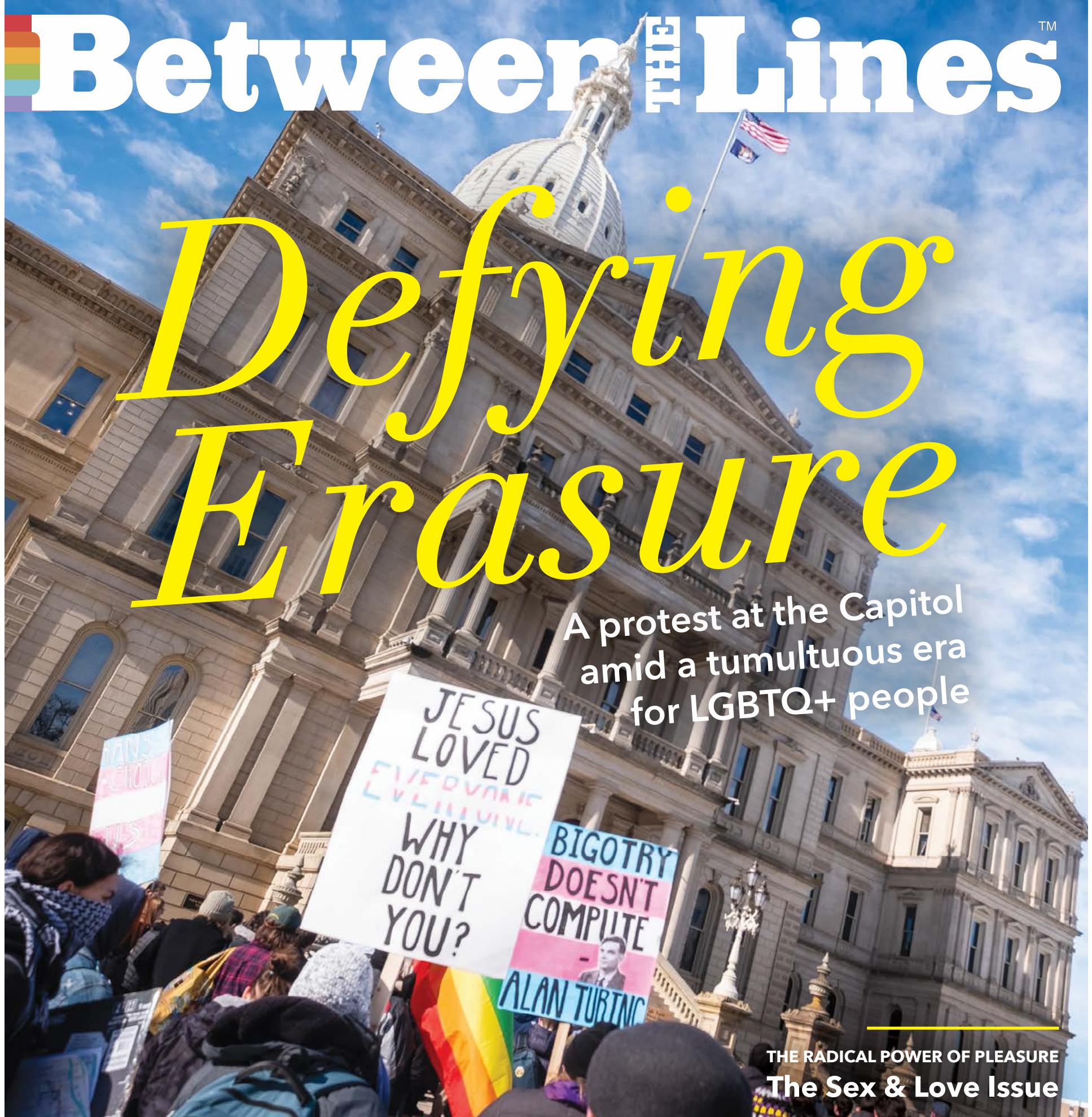


MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

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A protest at the Capitol
amid a tumultuous era
for LGBTQ+ people



THE RADICAL POWER OF PLEASURE
The Sex & Love Issue



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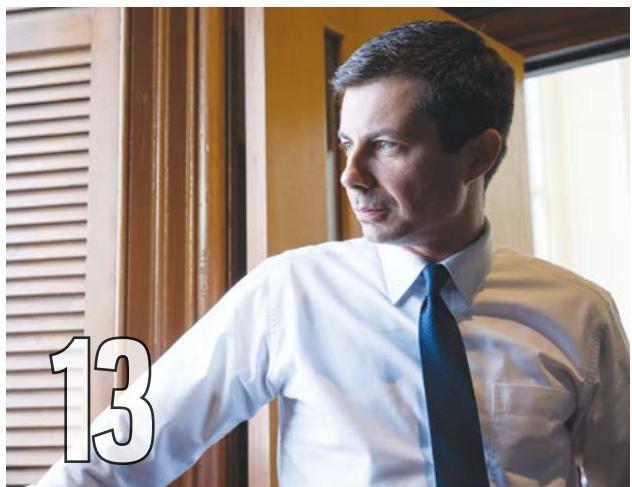
Community Health Awareness Group
1300 West Fort St.,
Detroit, MI 48226
313-963-3434 x118



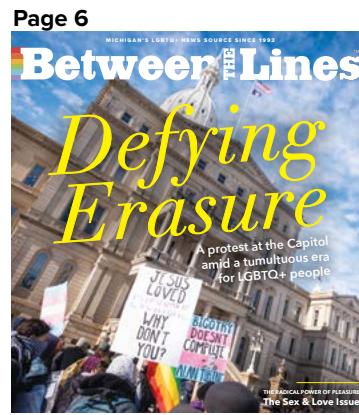
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5103 West Pierson St.
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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 How a Michigan Trans Rights Rally Ignited Nationwide Solidarity
- 8 The Groundbreaking 1980s Sex Ed Advertising That Helped Save Lives (Sponsored)
- 10 'They Won't Put Us Back in the Closet': Michigan Leaders Respond to Trump's Anti-LGBTQ+ Orders
- 11 How New Hate Crime Protections Will Impact Michigan's LGBTQ+ Community
- 12 Creep of the Week: Democrats Counter Republican Screams with Cowardly Silence
- 13 The Scroll: Historic Senate Bid? Buttigieg Eyes Michigan Race as First Openly Gay Senator
- 14 Sex as Resistance: How the Radical Act of Pleasure Should Be — and Can Be — Reimagined
- 15 'Being a Mess and in Love in Your 30s': Redefining Millennial Queer Love on Screen
- 17 From Messy Chaos to Domestic Bliss: The Simple Fix That Changed Everything
- 18 When Pleasure Becomes a Protest: The Fight Over Who Gets to Enjoy Sex
- 20 How a Gay Detroit Bakery Owner Paved His Own Path and Opened the City's First Filipino Bakery
- 22 Melissa Etheridge on Touring with the Indigo Girls and Her No 'Fs to Give' Mentality in the Trump Era



An image from the Jan. 30 Transgender Unity Coalition rally at the Michigan State Capitol. Photo: Brian Wells

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Oh, beloved queerios, it's only February, but this year already feels endless — I'm starting to understand why bears hibernate. (Forest bears, not gay bears — unless Scruff has a setting I missed.)

If you need a break from Executive Order-ageddon, why not dance with the Swifties, time-warp with "Rocky Horror" or check out some erotic (or not-so-erotic) art?

Nothing distracts from Project 2025's dumpster fire come to life quite like running into three exes on a first date. Dystopia is easier with community!



Attend a Valentine's Day Taylor Swift Dance Party

You don't have to be a gaylor to join Ferndale Pride for a Valentine's Day Taylor Swift Dance Party at the Orchid Theatre. Wear your best red and pink outfit (bonus points if this involves a Cardigan) to manifest the Love Story of your Wildest Dreams.

Ferndale Pride Executive Director Julia Music tells BTL the event will be welcoming to all attendees. "Whether you come alone, with friends or with loved ones, everyone is welcome to sing and dance — no date required," she says. "Our events are all about creating connections, so come as you are."

If there's a Blank Space in your calendars, we hope to see you there! Tickets are selling out faster than Taylor's "1989" album so don't delay and risk being the Anti-Hero in your couple/friend group. Come ready to Shake It Off!

Feb. 14, 9 p.m., Orchid Theatre (141 West Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Tickets are available now at bit.ly/4fVieNg.



Chris Harder, Dirty Show performer. Photo: Facebook/ @TheDirtyShow

Get Dirty at the 25th Annual Dirty Show

When the queer-inclusive erotic art exhibition Dirty Show started in 1999, the whole event could fit into the attic of an auto body shop. Now, 25 years later, producer Jerry Vile is putting on bigger shows that push boundaries further each year. Queer affirmation and inclusion is always at the center.

Highlights this year include numerous immersive art experiences with a Burlesque Extravaganza, film screenings at the Cinerotic Film Festival, food and drink and, of course, a spanking booth.

Feb. 14-22, Russell Exhibition Center (1600 Clay St., Detroit). Ticketing information at dirtydetroit.com/tickets25.



The Clare Gatto and Kara Güt: Magic Circle exhibit at MOCAD. Photo: MOCAD

See a Queer-Coded Art Exhibit at MOCAD

If your heart has had enough actual reality for one day, don't miss The Clare Gatto and Kara Güt: Magic Circle exhibit, on display through Feb. 23 at MOCAD.

Fantasy role-playing video games inspire the exhibition, and the artists use the designs and themes from the games to imagine a different world and a mysterious "in-between" space where the lines between the virtual world and the real world blur.

Gatto and Güt have photography as their artistic root and use photos as raw material to build a layered space which will surely intrigue people interested in queer art or even those who simply wish to build a both/and instead of an either/or world.

Through Feb. 23, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (4454 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Learn more at mocadetroit.org/clare-gatto-kara-güt-magic-circle.



"RHPS" shadow cast performer. Photo: michiganrhpstumblr.com

Do the Time Warp Again

For those of us who've been queer since lesbian dinosaurs roamed in prehistoric Birkenstocks, "Rocky Horror Picture Show" screenings (and the wild audience participation) were our first taste of camp — no tents required.

While these screenings are nearly extinct, Detroit keeps the tradition alive thanks to the RHPS Preservation Society. With a full shadow cast, you'll get a movie, a stage show and a chance to join the fun. Costumes encouraged. And costumes always make queers feel better. You'll laugh, cry (just me in seventh grade?) and, yes, there's toast!

Second and fourth Saturdays, 11:15 p.m.-2:30 a.m., Wayne State University Theatre (35164 Michigan Ave., Detroit). Learn more at michiganrhpst.org.



Find Your Focus

If you've been doomscrolling under the covers, eating ice cream from the carton with a candy bar as a spoon (purely hypothetical, of course), you might wonder: Can I stay in fight-or-flight mode for four more years?

Maybe, but it's exhausting. Try an intermittent media fast — like the straight coworker diet plan, but without the hangry vibes. Then focus on key issues you care about. As a nurse, I follow Jessica Halem's Substack breaking down Project 2025's threats to queer health. It's doom, but manageable.

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Photo by Jeff Hirsch

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How a Michigan Trans Rights Rally Ignited Nationwide Solidarity

Michigan's Transgender Unity Coalition inspires national day of protest



Images from the Jan. 30 Transgender Unity Coalition rally at the Michigan State Capitol. Photos: Brian Wells

BY ANNI ARBOUR

On Jan. 30, more than 100 transgender people and allies assembled at the steps of the Michigan Capitol Building on a cold winter afternoon to voice their solidarity in the face of the recent onslaught of executive orders targeting the trans community.

What started as a local event planned by the Michigan-based

Transgender Unity Coalition (TUC) quickly evolved into a nationwide movement. Contacts made via Discord and other social media soon attracted activists in other states. By the day of the rallies, eight other coordinated protests took place in California, Colorado, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin.

The breadth of the events was so large that TUC's executive

director, Bree Taylor, decided to head the Columbus, Ohio rally herself, and asked Mallory Fournier to lead the Lansing event.

A resident of Ferndale and a civil engineer working in renewable energy, this was not Fournier's first foray into activism. She had joined TUC and lobbied on its behalf to secure the passage of House Bills 5300-5303, which eased name and gender

marker changes in the state of Michigan. When she heard about the formation of the Transgender Unity Rally, she asked how she could help, and Taylor entrusted her with the responsibility of running the Michigan rally.

Fournier and various volunteers arrived about an hour before the noon start of the rally to set up as an enthusiastic crowd started building. "Organizing gives me goosebumps," Fournier noted.

"The solidarity and the support just makes me feel like we can do anything!"

As the audience quickly grew, politicians like Rep. Julie Brixie (D-Meridian Twp.) and longtime transgender activist Grace Bacon, who founded the seminal transgender advocacy organization Crossroads in 1977, took the stage.

"So happy we did [start early] because it gave us a long space to



allow the community to come and speak, which I felt made our event so damn special. It's so important to give people that space in the most accepting crowd you'll ever be in front of," Fournier said.

The rallies were all live-streamed and videos came in from the other state capital events showing similarly large turnouts. The Sacramento, California protest alone drew well over 100 people. The success and resulting

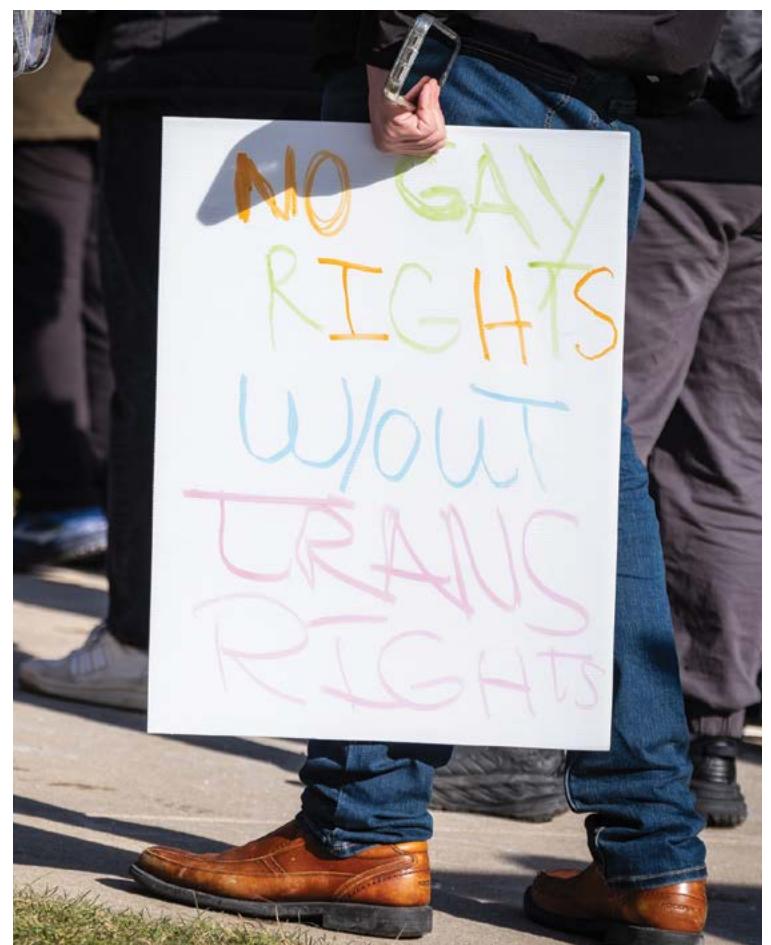
enthusiasm they generated has led TUC head Taylor to announce a national protest in Washington, D.C. on March 1.

"We saw our community and allies come together," Taylor said afterwards. "This day was a show of solidarity, telling those watching that they are not alone. On the contrary, they have love and support from many members of the public."

Fournier was even more

effusive in her summary of the Lansing rally.

"The energy the crowd gave was electrifying for the full three hours!" she said. "The amount of joy I saw on so many faces. To be surrounded by your own people, to be accepted, to know that we're here together, and together we can make it through these hard times."



HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!



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An early BTL print ad in progress from the late 1980s.

The Groundbreaking 1980s Sex Ed Advertising That Helped Save Lives

How Dr. Paul Benson built a career helping the LGBTQ+ community during the height of the AIDS crisis

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In 1980, when Dr. Paul Benson opened his LGBTQ-affirming Be Well Medical Center in Berkley,

advertising featuring LGBTQ+ imagery was still considered taboo — advertising depicting sex topics even more so.

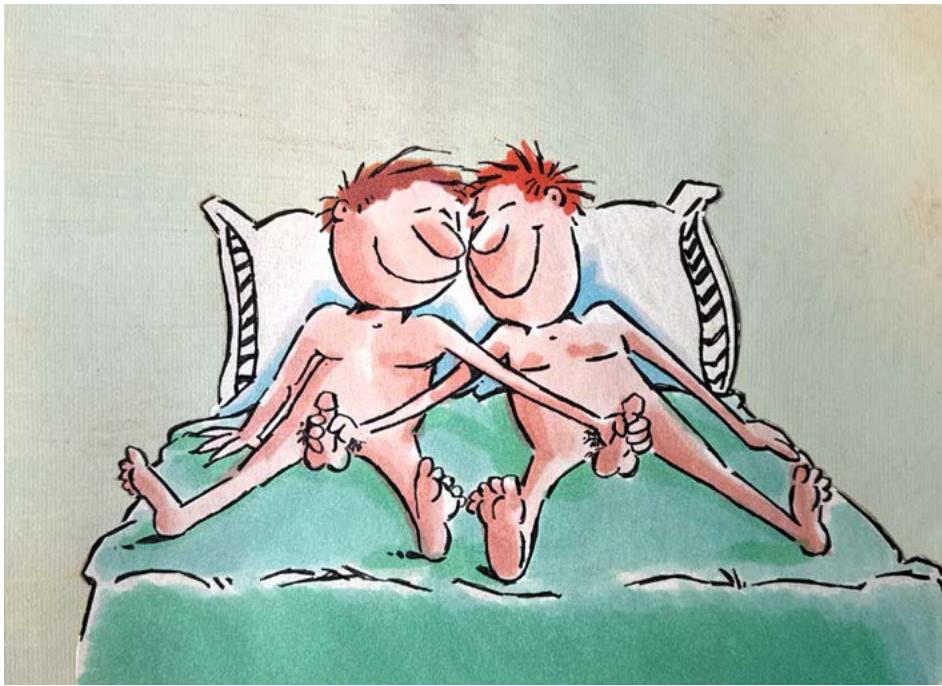
It was a revolutionary step when Dr. Benson explicitly targeted his

outreach to the local LGBTQ+ community through illustrated advertisements and educational videos at a time when most healthcare providers weren't willing to openly serve this population.

Often, that outreach was in the pages of local queer publications, including in the earliest issues of *Between The Lines* more than 30 years ago.

“It was a different world back

then. There was a lot more stigma against the LGBTQ community,” Dr. Benson reflects. “I started advertising in *Cruise* magazine just to make it known that there was a clinic that would treat you with



These cartoon stills appeared in a sexual health video Dr. Benson shared with patients in the 1980s.

respect and understanding."

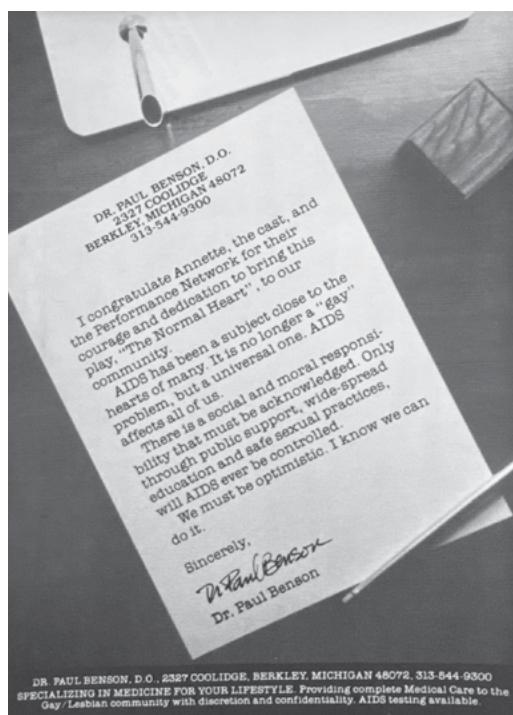
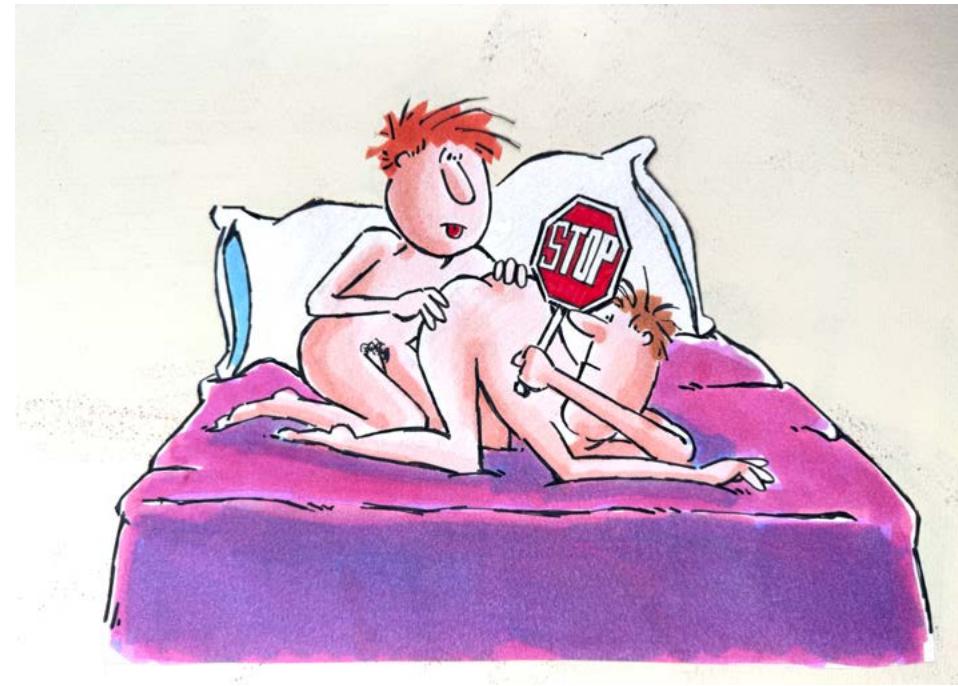
Early advertisements for Dr. Benson's practice spoke directly to the community in an authentic way, using vernacular common at the time and marrying wholesome imagery with taboo sex topics, underscoring the

"A lot of patients were having problems finding physicians to take care of them," he explains. "It was not unusual for patients to come in my office where their friends would be dragging them in when they were sick with an opportunistic disease like pneumocystis pneumonia. Because a lot of other clinics didn't want these conditions in their office and didn't understand."

In 1980, Dr. Benson produced "Living Your Lifestyle," a groundbreaking 30-minute educational video featuring doctors, patients and custom-commissioned artwork discussing sexually transmitted infections and prevention. "Medical education through video was unheard of back in 1980, 1981. This was really a very novel idea," he notes. He would go on to use these images and others in advertisements in local publications like *Between The Lines* to help get the message across that affirming, compassionate care was available to the local community at a time when LGBTQ+ patients — especially gay men with HIV and AIDS — were being openly discriminated against by medical professionals.

Today, Be Well serves patients of all ages and backgrounds with on-site X-ray equipment, lab testing and pharmacy services. The clinic offers standard primary care like wellness visits, immunizations and acute care, while maintaining a focus on long-term patient relationships. Sexual health and wellbeing is a primary specialty at Be Well, which offers on-site testing and comprehensive HIV prevention and care approaches.

Dr. Benson's practice now includes specialized pediatric care for LGBTQ+ youth, with a full-time pediatrician on staff — a development he never imagined possible 40 years ago. The practice serves as a safe



Dr. Benson's 2008 open letter to the producers of a local theater production focused on AIDS.

fact that sex between LGBTQ+ people is normal, often joyful and, hopefully, centered on pleasure. The images showed potential patients they had every reason to believe they'd find an affirming, non-judgmental environment at Be Well — and for more than four decades, they have.

What began as a general family practice quickly evolved into specialized LGBTQ+ care as the AIDS crisis unfolded in Michigan.

SPREAD THE WORD... NOT THE DISEASE!

2 OUT OF 3 GAY MEN WILL HAVE HEPATITIS B IN THEIR LIFETIME.
Last year, over 5,000 people died from it. Many people don't even show symptoms and never know they've had the disease. Up to 10% of Hepatitis B Victims can be carriers who pass the disease on to others. The most alarming fact about Hepatitis B is the lack of information most people have about it.

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED IN STARTING THE MICHIGAN HEPATITIS B ASSOCIATION.
The main goal of this organization is to establish a support group for Hepatitis B carriers. Anyone interested in the disease or the support group should attend. This organization will also work to inform the public about the disease and its preventive measures.

THERE ARE TWO ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS SCHEDULED. YOU MAY ATTEND EITHER OR BOTH.
The first organizational meeting will be Tues. Sept. 25, 1984 at 7:30 pm. The second meeting will be Tues. Oct. 10, 1984 at 7:30 pm as a community service, both meetings will be held at Dr. Paul Benson's office, 2227 Coolidge Rd., Berkley, MI. 48072, (3 Blks. North of 11 Mile Rd. - 1 Blk. West of Woodward)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL: 544-9300.

Ads like this one, which educated readers about Hepatitis, were vitally important before the internet became commonplace.

space where LGBTQ+ youth and parents can receive culturally competent care without fear of discrimination. Staff are trained in using preferred names and pronouns while addressing the specific health needs of LGBTQ+ patients, all within a modern medical facility that maintains a judgment-free environment for every family.

While the need for targeted advertising has diminished with greater societal acceptance and accessibility of information, Dr. Benson's commitment to providing affirming care remains steadfast, though he acknowledges the challenges facing the community in the current political climate. "The openness and acceptability is much higher nowadays," he reflects. "Who knows, 50 years from now, it

probably is going to be even that much easier. I'd like to think that way and be optimistic."

Looking back on his pioneering efforts in LGBTQ+ healthcare outreach, Dr. Benson sees how far we've come while acknowledging ongoing challenges. "Yes, there's room for removal of more stigma today, but back then it was much, much more than it is today. Slowly but surely, it's getting better and better."

This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Be Well Medical Center. Between The Lines' LGBTQ+ journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Be Well. To learn more about Be Well, visit doctorbewell.com.

'They Won't Put Us Back in the Closet'

Michigan leaders respond to Trump's anti-LGBTQ+ orders

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In a devastating escalation of anti-LGBTQ+ policies, President Trump's Day One executive orders have shattered protections for LGBTQ+ Americans — especially our transgender siblings.

Beyond reinstating the trans military ban, Trump signed two additional orders impacting our community: one prohibiting gender-affirming care nationwide for anyone under 19, and another requiring schools to out LGBTQ+ students to their parents regardless of home safety concerns. The "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government" order, which declares that the U.S. officially recognizes only two genders, combined with these new directives, represents an unprecedented federal assault on trans existence and youth safety.

"These executive orders are an attack on the queer community, with particularly severe implications for our transgender community," Affirmations Executive Director Cheryl Czach told BTL. "They ignore reality, are filled with disinformation and are meant to create division and chaos."

Here's what the trans, non-binary and allied community needs to understand about what's at stake and how Michigan leaders are responding.

The big picture

Let's be clear: these orders represent an attempt to fundamentally rewrite how the federal government recognizes and treats transgender people. The language here is chillingly familiar to anyone who knows their LGBTQ+ history. Just look at the title's emphasis on "defending" and "restoring," echoing the same inflammatory rhetoric used against civil rights movements in the 1960s.

By framing trans existence as an "attack" on women and institutions, it pulls from the same playbook used against gay marriage, when opponents claimed they were "defending the sanctity of marriage."



Even the order's strategic focus on trans women while conspicuously ignoring trans men mirrors historical tactics of singling out specific groups as threats to society. These aren't just words — they're calculated choices that tap into decades-old patterns of resistance to civil rights progress.

What's in these orders?

Identity documents under attack

Remember the progress we made with federal "X" gender markers and updated passports? That's all on the chopping block. One executive order demands that federal documents, including passports and visas, reflect only what the administration is calling "biological sex." We've seen similar policies in states like Florida and Texas, where some of our community members have already had their driver's licenses revoked. The federal impact could be even more far-reaching. Here in Michigan, state ID and birth certificate laws, including two newly signed laws, should remain unaffected unless Republican legislators seek to change them.

Public schools

One of Trump's orders would

significantly impact transgender and gender non-conforming students in public schools by prohibiting schools from acknowledging transgender identities, requiring parental notification if students request different names/pronouns regardless of safety concerns, banning access to facilities and sports teams matching students' gender identity, and mandating curriculum changes to remove or minimize historical content related to discrimination and social justice regarding race, gender and LGBTQ+ issues.

Federal spaces and facilities

Another order takes direct aim at trans people's access to federal spaces, including national parks, Smithsonian museums, federal airports, VA hospitals — all places where our community could face new restrictions and discrimination. It's reminiscent of the bathroom bills we've fought against, but on a national scale.

Detention and incarceration

For our incarcerated trans siblings, the situation is particularly dire. One of Trump's orders mandates sex-based housing in federal facilities and cuts off funding for gender-affirming care. We've

already witnessed the devastating effects of similar policies in states like Florida, where incarcerated trans women have faced forced haircuts and confiscation of personal items and have been forced into state-sponsored conversion therapy.

Workplace rights at risk

Another Day One order attempts to weaponize the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) — yes, the very agency meant to protect workers — against trans employees using facilities that match their gender identity. While similar attempts have failed at the state level, this federal push demands our vigilance.

Rolling back progress

In a particularly cruel move, one of the orders aims to strip away vital protections:

- Title IX guidance protecting trans students
- Anti-bullying protections in schools
- Workplace discrimination protections
- Guidelines protecting intersex youth

Gender-affirming care funding ban

The executive order targeting gender-affirming care has created widespread uncertainty and disruption in healthcare services. Under the order, the federal government will cease funding, sponsoring, promoting, assisting or supporting gender-affirming care for those under 19, including puberty blockers, hormones and surgeries.

Roz Keith, founder of Stand with Trans, told BTL her organization is approaching the situation carefully, sharing information as it comes in and guiding community members toward important resources. "There's so much panic that I feel like it's on us to figure out what this all means, stay on top of things, get it out to the community, minimize the panic if we can," she explained.

Keith says healthcare providers across the country are already responding to the order. "Appointments are being canceled," she said. One parent she talked to shared that an upcoming appointment for gender-affirming care was canceled at the last minute. Many families are in limbo as their providers determine whether providing gender-affirming care could put funding for their entire medical system at risk. The way the executive order reads, Keith explains, "they can't use federal funds for gender-affirming care. But if they receive federal funding and still provide gender-affirming care, even if they aren't using those funds, well, they could get shut down. That's what's got a lot of providers really scared."

Some families are taking drastic measures, Keith reported. "I just talked to a parent who's actually leaving the country with her trans daughter. First, it is really dreadful that they feel like they have to leave the country. Two, they're very privileged because they have the resources and means to do it. Most people can't even think about

See **Trump Orders**, page 26

How New Hate Crime Protections Will Impact Michigan's LGBTQ+ Community

Out Rep. Noah Arbit co-authored bills that add sexual orientation, gender identity and expression to existing law

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In a historic move for LGBTQ+ rights in Michigan, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has signed the Michigan Hate Crime Act into law, marking the first major update to the state's hate crime legislation since 1988. The law takes effect April 2, positioning Michigan among states with the strongest hate crime protections in the nation.

The update comes amid an onslaught of anti-LGBTQ+ executive orders — especially anti-trans orders — signed by President Trump since he took office Jan. 20. Orders including a nationwide ban on gender-affirming care for people under 19, a trans military ban, a proclamation that the U.S. only recognizes two genders, as well as requiring public schools to out LGBTQ+ students to their parents, have injected a healthy dose of fear into the queer community in Michigan and beyond.

The new legislation also arrives on the heels of a tragic incident at Syracuse VA Medical Center, where a transgender veteran died by suicide on Jan. 27. The veteran, who had been discharged from the facility's inpatient psychiatry unit on Jan. 21, was found wrapped in a transgender Pride flag after falling from the hospital's parking garage. The veteran's death highlights ongoing concerns about mental health care access and support for LGBTQ+ veterans.

Michigan continues to tell a different, more queer-affirming story as the new language explicitly includes protections for individuals targeted based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, which are not included in the existing hate crime law. Michigan's current hate crime law makes it a felony to harm, or threaten to harm, a person or the property of a person,

"with specific intent to intimidate or harass" that person "because of that person's race, color, religion, gender or national origin."

"Hate crimes are unique because there is never just one victim of a hate crime; an entire community is victimized, too," explains bill co-author State Rep. Noah Arbit (D-West Bloomfield). "Hate crimes tell all those who share a victim's community: People like you aren't welcome, people like you don't belong, people like you won't be safe."

The legislation significantly strengthens penalties for hate-motivated crimes. First-time offenders now face up to two years in prison and fines up to \$5,000. More serious violations, including second offenses or crimes committed against minors, carry penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment and \$15,000 in fines.

For Arbit, this legislation represents both a personal and professional milestone. "As a Jew and a gay man from an incredibly diverse community like West Bloomfield, the issue of hate crimes is deeply personal to me," he says. "That's why I ran for office on a pledge to take on rising hate crimes."

The path to passing this legislation wasn't easy. "It took two years of battling disinformation, bigotry, lies and political paralysis, and there were many times when it seemed it would never get done," Arbit reflects. "But I came to this office with a job to do and a



Rep. Noah Arbit. Courtesy photo

promise to keep. I refused to take no for an answer, and we got it done."

"We have seen many laws updated and we have more understanding of certain discrimination since the '80s," Rep. Kristian Grant (D-Grand Rapids), who co-authored the bill with Arbit, told Michigan Public. "So it's clearly clarifying what a hate crime is and putting penalties on the books that will really hold people accountable. It's not just a slap on the wrist."

The new law criminalizes various forms of hate-motivated behavior, including:

- Physical violence or force against individuals

- Causing bodily injury
- Stalking
- Damaging, destroying or defacing personal property

against LGBTQ+ Michiganders will finally be possible — as will justice for survivors."

In a statement, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel emphasized the law's importance, noting that previous hate crime laws were "inadequate to deter and properly prosecute those that target Michigan residents with fear and hatred, simply for who they are."

The legislation faced some hurdles before passage, including opposition based on false claims about misgendering. However, after careful revisions, the bills passed both chambers of the Michigan legislature largely along party lines.

Democrats Counter Republican Screams with Cowardly Silence

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I'm watching the U.S. fall to fascism in real time and yet the alarm bell that I, and so many others, are ringing is being ignored by the majority of the country. Republicans are all-in on Team Fascism. That's a lost cause. But where are the Democrats?

I read a book once about "zombie insects." These are insects that are infected with a type of fungus or other parasite that gradually kills them. All the while, the parasite takes control of the insect. The end goal is to further spread the parasite to other insects, starting the zombie life and death cycle all over again.

I now find myself comparing Democratic elected officials to zombie insects. It's as if Republicans have taken control of Democratic brains so that Democrats think that they are working in opposition to the racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic, Christian nationalist Republican agenda, but what they are really doing is helping this harmful agenda survive and spread.

Can there be any other explanation for the Democrats who keep voting to confirm Trump's grossly unqualified nominees to cabinet positions? For the Democrats voting for legislation that makes it easier for the Trump Administration to harass, arrest and deport immigrants? For why Senate Minority



from the Democrats is part of their grand plan.

"Burned by their failures to end the Trump era the first time, Democrats are crafting a new playbook for his second administration that departs from the noisy resistance of his first presidency," NBC reports. "The new approach...will be to zero in on pocketbook issues as they lay the groundwork for the 2026 midterm elections and beyond. And they plan to focus less on his cultural taunts and issues that don't reach the kitchen table."

I see. So the Democrats have decided to only focus on the important things — or at least what they deem important — and ignore Trump's "cultural taunts."

Keep in mind that what's being dismissed as "cultural taunts" is Trump's demonization of transgender people and immigrants and his positioning of them as enemies, which is laying the groundwork for state-sanctioned violence. And might I add that transgender

people and immigrants sit at kitchen tables just like everyone else.

"I think we have to pick our fights and not chase after every crazy squirrel," Sen. Adam Schiff (D-California) said, according to NBC News.

It is true that Trump's playbook is to "flood the zone" so that the average person can't keep up. But Schumer and Schiff aren't average people. They're United States senators. Their

job is to keep up and fight against the abuse and lawlessness of this administration. They need to "chase after every crazy squirrel" because all of these squirrels have rabies. People who pay even marginal attention to politics are alarmed at what the Trump Administration is doing right now.

They're also alarmed at the absence of Democratic response. And the idea that this silence is intentional is not at all comforting.

Look, you don't win by ignoring this stuff. Michigan Sen. Mallory McMorrow gave a master class in 2022 about how to directly address hateful garbage when her Republican colleague accused her of being a "groomer" because she stood up for LGBTQ+ kids. McMorrow's floor speech went viral.

She received praise from all over the country. Longtime Democratic strategist James Carville called McMorrow's speech an "enormously effective piece of communication" that should be used as an "instructional video" for Democrats. She even got a phone call from President Joe Biden.

Apparently, the Democratic Party writ large didn't take McMorrow's example to heart.

When Democrats ignore the persecution and scapegoating of transgender people, when they ignore the inhumane treatment of migrants, what they are doing is normalizing it. Their silence is essentially saying to the majority of the country, "This is not such a big deal." And to the people directly affected they're saying, "You're on your own."

For decades now I've heard, "Democrats are terrible at messaging." It's true that messaging is hard. Especially when there's non-stop noise from the opposition party. What Democrats need to be doing is getting a megaphone and screaming from the highest mountain. Instead, they have decided to say nothing.

Which is the worst message of all.

When Democrats ignore the persecution and scapegoating of transgender people, when they ignore the inhumane treatment of migrants, what they are doing is normalizing it.

Leader Chuck Schumer is posting inane shit about tomatoes and guac on social media while Elon Musk and his minions have broken into the Treasury's payment system? For why Democrats are more or less silent as the CDC demands that terms like "LGBT" and "transgender" be scrubbed from medical research, not to mention the tsunami of anti-trans proclamations Trump keeps issuing?

According to a Jan. 28 NBC News article, the eerie silence

Historic Senate Bid? Buttigieg Eyes Michigan Race as First Openly Gay Senator

Former U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Michigan's most prominent out gay politician and a Traverse City resident, is exploring a potential historic run for U.S. Senate in 2026, following Sen. Gary Peters' announcement that he won't seek re-election.

"Pete is exploring all of his options on how he can be helpful and continue to serve," a source familiar with Buttigieg's thinking told the Detroit Free Press. If successful, Buttigieg would become the first openly gay man to serve in the U.S. Senate.

The 43-year-old former presidential candidate and his husband Chasten, a Traverse City native, have been building deeper Michigan roots since Pete's appointment as Transportation Secretary. The couple have been raising their adopted twins in Michigan.

Recently, Buttigieg signaled his dedication to Michigan life, telling Politico, "If you're in Washington too long, there's absolutely a risk that you can begin to care more about the things that this town cares about than some of the things that matter to your neighbors."

There has also been a great deal of political speculation about a potential gubernatorial run from Buttigieg with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer reaching her term limit in 2026. Secretary of State, ally Jocelyn Benson, recently announced her candidacy for this role.



Pete Buttigieg. Photo: Facebook/@petegettieg

Michigan's Ban on Conversion Therapy Stands Despite Legal Challenge

A federal court has upheld Michigan's ban on conversion therapy for minors, rejecting an attempt by Catholic Charities to block the law's

enforcement. The ruling, issued Jan. 28 by U.S. District Judge Jane Beckering, keeps in place vital protections for LGBTQ+ youth in the state.

Michigan joined over 20 other states in banning the practice in February 2024. The law prohibits licensed mental health professionals from attempting to change a minor's sexual orientation or gender identity, with violations carrying penalties up to \$250,000.

The impact is significant — approximately 10%

of LGBTQ+ youth in Michigan have faced threats of conversion therapy, while 5% have already experienced it, according to The Trevor Project.

Attorney General Dana Nessel celebrated the ruling, telling MLive, "States have a duty to shield their residents, especially kids, from treatments proven to cause devastating harm."

The case continues as Catholic Charities appeals the decision to the Sixth Circuit Court.

Gay Capitol Rioter Rejects Trump Pardon

A Jan. 6 rioter has publicly rejected former President Trump's pardon, declaring "Trump can shove his pardon up his ass." Jason Riddle, who served 90 days in prison for his role in the Capitol breach, reportedly learned of his pardon while at the gym with his husband.

The U.S. Navy veteran entered the Capitol during the riot, where he drank wine from the Parliamentarian's office and took items from the building. Initially celebrated as a "patriot hero" in prison, Riddle's perspective shifted after his release when he questioned Trump's continued rallies despite the violence and deaths on Jan. 6, 2021. Now sober and focused on mental health, Riddle accepts responsibility for his actions, crediting the legal consequences for helping him build a "happy and fruitful existence."

Lady Gaga Prepares to Unleash 'Mayhem'

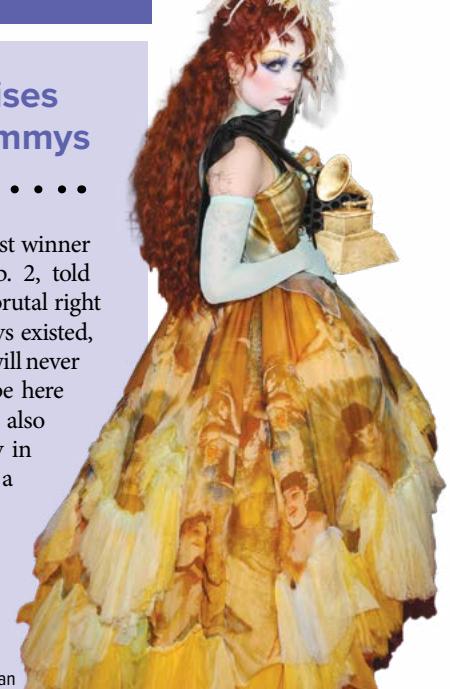
Steadfast ally Lady Gaga recently announced her seventh studio album, "Mayhem," set to release March 7. The 14-track project marks Mother Monster's return to pop music while incorporating fresh artistic elements. "Disease," praised for its industrial-tinged production, was released in October as the album's lead single. On Sunday, the performer's duet with Bruno Mars, "Die with a Smile," won the 2025 Grammy for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance. Gaga premiered the third single, "Abracadabra," at the awards show.

Whitmer's Hit Memoir 'True Gretch' Gets Teen Edition

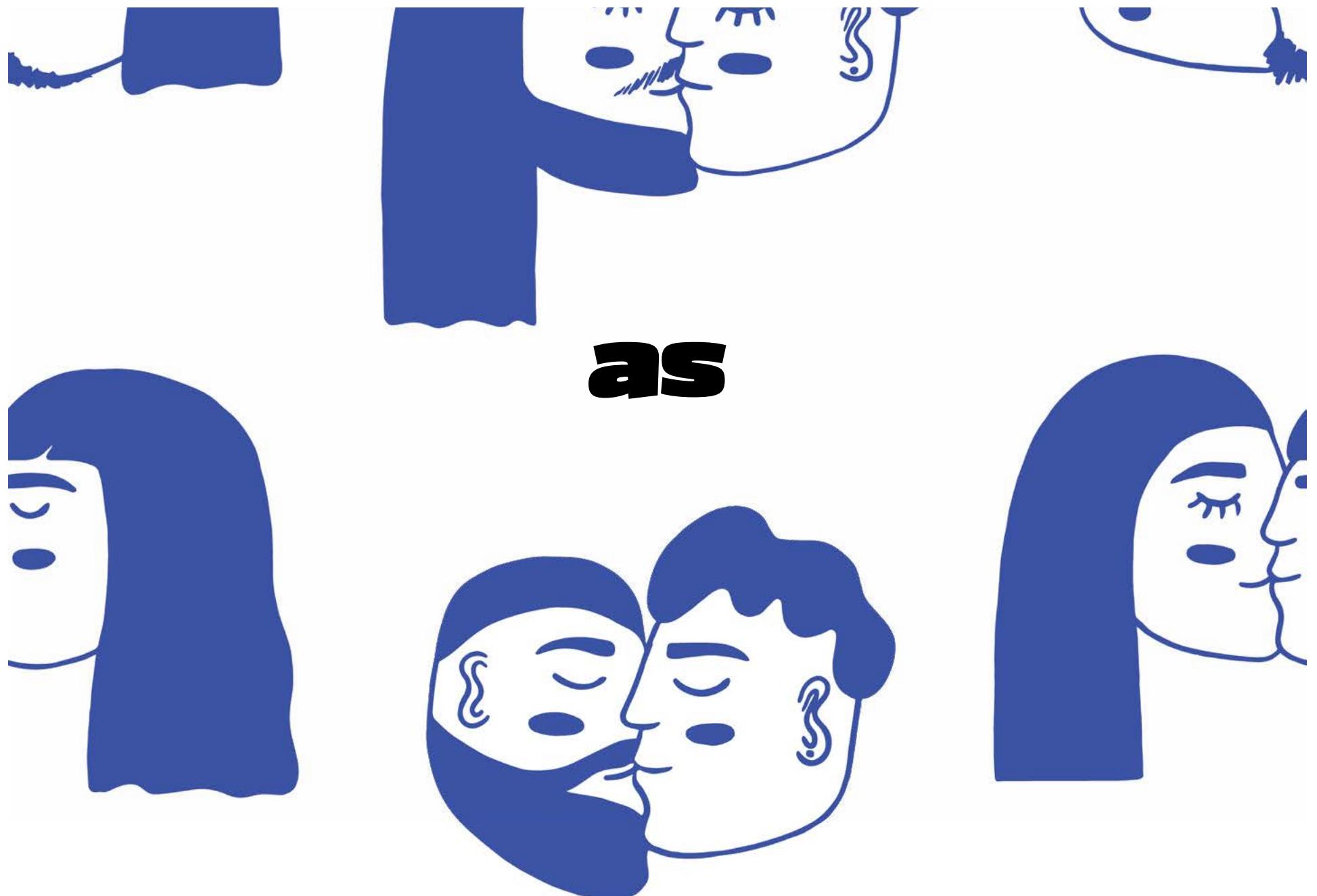
Gov. Gretchen Whitmer released a young adult adaptation of her bestselling memoir "True Gretch" on Jan. 28. This edition reshapes her candid stories of leadership — from surviving an assassination attempt to governing through a pandemic — for teen readers. Blending motherly advice with her trademark sharp wit, Whitmer shows young readers how to lead and make change.

Chappell Roan Praises 'Trans Girls' at Grammys

Chappell Roan, Best New Artist winner at the Grammy Awards on Feb. 2, told GLAAD on the red carpet: "It's brutal right now, but trans people have always existed, and they will forever exist... they will never take trans joy away. I wouldn't be here without trans girls." Lady Gaga also mentioned the trans community in her award speech for "Die with a Smile," declaring, "Trans people are not invisible. Trans people deserve love."



Chappell Roan. Photo: Instagram/@chappelroan



How the radical act of pleasure should be — and can be — reimagined

BY JASMINE ISA QURESHI

One of my clearest memories of school was being taken out of sex education classes. I remember feeling ... relieved? Relieved I didn't have to address the sick feeling that crept into the pit of my gut and my tight chest whenever sex was mentioned.

Sex was never mentioned at home. Worse, it was an insult to speak of it. Laced with all the shame of repressed Muslim adult fear, it would be as if you personally attacked my parents' conscience, or their physical body, causing them to shrink away and return

with greater anger. Sex wasn't just forgotten about, it was never approached, and all possibilities of approaching it were cut away in the process. It was burned from my kid peripherals.

Search the word "sex," and you'll receive everything. The definition of biological sex, attached as it is to traits, identifiers and body structures. Positions, activities, descriptions, types of sex. Anthologies on histories of sexuality, sexual health, medical records, etymology of the word and on and on.

Ultimately, I'd say sex is undefinable. Because it is so

redefinable and regenerative. It is gorgeously fluid as a mechanism and word.

What we have done is create an umbrella. This umbrella that we call "sex" is filled with so much it overflows, and one of those things is something so incredibly powerful, to even utilize it would — and does — topple realities. It's called self.

Self is another huge term. It's important because it pins itself to questioning.

Perhaps it was so disliked in my early household because an allowance of discussion and understanding of it is a pathway

into the exploration of self. If molded however you wish, it can be a powerful form of expression, as it insists on a deeper understanding of yourself than what you are told — it reattaches "pleasure" to the idea of being alive, not just as a luxury, but inherently as a right.

It can cause you to question. And that isn't something that systemic and religious control can healthily deal with.

Stop.

It's not that easy.

Because if sex just did all of that by existing, we wouldn't have sexual abuse or reproductive

rights influencing the very existence of folks, and we wouldn't be having this conversation.

The sad truth is that sex is so ultimately regenerative, undefinable and personal-interaction constructed, it can't be absolutely liberational or absolutely toxic. It is both and much, much more.

We need to go back to "molded in the way you wish" and the experiences I had growing up. What you've been reading about here is a general statement on sex,

See **Sex As Resistance**, page 16

‘Being a Mess and in Love in Your 30s’: Redefining Millennial Queer Love on Screen

Creator Kit Williamson is leaning into the raw and real side of queer romance



James Bland, as Dan, and Kit Williamson, as Noah. Courtesy photo

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

Kit Williamson is no stranger to creating and highlighting authentic queer storylines. The actor and writer is known for a recurring role — shy copywriter Ed Gifford on “Man Men” — and for creating “EastSiders,” a series that Williamson says showcases “being a mess and in love in your 20s” and which won him a Daytime Emmy in 2020.

Williamson, who attended Michigan’s Interlochen Arts Academy, says the fourth and final season of “EastSiders,” which premiered on Netflix in December of 2019, acted as “a love letter to queer relationships and queer love,”

and his latest project, a series called “Unconventional” premiering Feb. 11 on LGBTQ+ streamer Revry, is the “spiritual successor to ‘EastSiders.’”

“‘Unconventional’ is instead about being a mess and in love in your 30s,” he tells BTL.

While “EastSiders” discusses infidelity and how trust impacts and impedes relationships, “Unconventional” takes a different approach to commitment. The series follows two queer couples: Noah and Dan, a “monogamish” married pair, and Margot and Eliza, who are navigating the challenges of having a baby via a sperm donor — played by Williamson — who also happens to be Margot’s brother,

Noah.

“Frameworks don’t always fit us [queer people] like a glove,” says Williamson, a theme highlighted not only in the title of the show but also in the dynamics of the characters.

“We don’t really have clearly laid out paths for us, so you get to chart the path, but there’s nothing to say that path won’t be rocky,” he adds.

Williamson says his goal with “Unconventional” was to showcase real, raw people and their nontraditional arrangements, and not to “paint any relationship with a broad brush.” The characters grapple with complex issues, like mental health struggles, trust, family planning as a queer couple,

and what it’s like to bring “guest stars into the bedroom,” as Noah and Dan’s experimentation with an additional sexual partner complicates their relationship.

“The show gives an unflinching look at queer relationships, queer love and queer sex,” he says.

It was important to Williamson that the show gave equal weight to both Noah and Dan’s relationship and Margot and Eliza’s because each relationship had their own unique roadblocks and struggles. He says working in a writers’ room and collaborating with other queer artists of varying identities helped bring perspective and uniqueness to the characters.

“Plus, I love queer media that

grapples with relationships unlike my own,” says Williamson, who is married to his “EastSiders” castmate, John Halbach.

For Williamson, he says now more than ever queer people need to cling to each other and stick together “in the face of adversity.” Even if the world feels against us, he says, we should be pushing for our stories and voices to be heard, especially in mainstream media. Williamson says he is grateful for the space Revry gives to shows like “Unconventional.”

“This show would not be made now in the traditional television space. Other creators haven’t

See Kit Williamson, page 16

Kit Williamson

Continued from page 15

been afforded the opportunity yet," he says, despite many trying. Williamson also says the conversations surrounding "Unconventional" now mirror ones he had when "EastSiders" first premiered on YouTube in 2012, and despite the landscape seeming progressive as far as queer representation goes, that isn't necessarily true.

"We've essentially been given crumbs," says Williamson. "The need for queer-centered shows felt less urgent when queer characters were being included in mainstream media. But I don't think that's a substitute for queer stories that are actually centered."

When shows with queer representation are afforded that opportunity in a mainstream space, they often lose support or don't keep an upward trajectory. Or that representation is bleak and fleeting. GLAAD created a report to track the number of LGBTQ+ characters and television shows today, which



Cast from "Unconventional," a new series by Kit Williamson (right). Courtesy photo

breaks the characters down by gender, race, sexuality and other factors. Recently, they added their "Where We Are On TV" report to highlight the number of LGBTQ+-inclusive series being canceled or abruptly ending.

In its "Where We Are On TV 2023-2024" report, the organization states that 468 LGBTQ+ characters were counted for that particular season, a decrease of 128 characters from the 596 in the previous season's

report. While several LGBTQ+-inclusive series were delayed due to production conflicts or strikes, the vast majority of queer character losses are due to their show ending or being canceled.

"Now we're not just burying our gays, we're canceling them," says Williamson, of the trope that gay characters often seem to reach heartbreak endings, like Lexa in "The 100" or Villanelle in "Killing Eve."



Briana Venskus, as Eliza, and Aubrey Peeples, as Margot. Courtesy photo

Another common conversation in the queer media space is that often the characters portrayed

are messy or dysfunctional, but Williamson actually leans into the "gray area and mess." Margot in "Unconventional" might be considered messy, but it's what makes her multidimensional and relatable.

"Sure, we need success stories and positive role models, but that's too much pressure and a burden to constantly put on the queer community to do. So often, our

characters are allowed to appear and announce their sexuality, but they're not allowed to have context and real issues."

But Williamson says he didn't set out to adhere to specific wants and demands of a network or a particular audience when creating "Unconventional." He wanted to create a show that felt authentic and, yes, unconventional.

"I wanted to show the queer point of view that isn't worried about being palatable to the straight audience," he says. "These relationships are not worried about being palatable; they are authentic, and real and fucked up."

Sex As Resistance

Continued from page 14

and framing it as general is also dangerous.

I am south Asian, and I grew up in a strict Muslim household. Today, I freely dissect my own queerness whenever I wish. As a child, though, the concept of queerness was constricted and framed as perversion. One of the reasons for it being a perversion was that it permitted more free experience of sex. To justify the "danger" — of being queer, and of queer persons — there needed to be a vilification, and reinforced defining, of sex itself, because then that backs up the vilification, and redefining, of queer persons.

That vilification was built by the emphasis of "duty." Reproduction was said to be a key part of being alive. If the reason for being alive is to reproduce, then your duty is to have sex for this outcome alone — not as a form of expression or self-reflection. Sex then becomes a powerful form of societal conformity.

Societies that dictate the

"proper" way to have sex and discourage open discussion about it (including the disinterest in sex) are deeply rooted in colonialism and capitalism.

They embody the idea that pleasure is an "extra," and push back against the idea that sex is something you can choose or decide not to be interested in at all. If people reimagined themselves based on what they wanted, as opposed to what is expected of them, sex could be a form of liberation, not control. Sex is dangerously weaponized. That's perhaps also a reason my parents were scared of it, even if they didn't realize it.

I believe my parents didn't teach me about sex because they were never taught about it, and when they experienced it, it was through the lens of duty and heteronormative, patriarchal discussion. Even more so, sex as a form of liberation was

seen as a "white" thing.

So, sex doesn't just equal freedom. And it doesn't equal control either. Like much of anything else, it is more about the personal interaction than the

learn about what beauty, pleasure and communication meant...no, sorry, I would learn about what was expected of me from those.

If there is no facilitation of true autonomy or agency amongst the most vulnerable of folks, then even acts that are seen as "liberational" can be filtered to control you more still.

Sex is still as heteronormative in the white mainstream, just as patriarchal and even more damaging because it erases questioning of itself as anything other than a good thing.

I had to break these barriers to learn who I am. The only way I was able to re-evaluate my own standards of beauty, the love I have for my trans, brown body, and even the discussions I now have around social justice was through a lot of re-evaluation of what I consider sex and sexuality.

Now, I don't think of sex as one

thing. The erasure of it, the forced understanding, the limitations, the beauty, the freedom to reject it as something I need. I now deal with interaction, and not blanket definition. I can now talk about sex without pushing every iteration and experience into three letters, and I can move outside of its confines.

The dissection of sex itself can be a powerful tool of liberation. But even that must be "queered" because the tools we think are so powerful to us as liberators have their toxicities too, and when formed in this white, old society, it is even more powerful to ask yourself what exactly it is you think about sex, and why.

Jasmine Isa Qureshi (they/she) is an interdisciplinary ecologist, marine biologist, social scientist, journalist and facilitator pursuing a Ph.D. at the Global Sustainability Institute at Anglia Ruskin University. Their work focuses on "queering" ecological perspectives to explore innovative approaches to ecology and social interactions. They are also an activist, award-winning poet and advisor to various orgs.

From Messy Chaos to Domestic Bliss: The Simple Fix That Changed Everything

Tackling the laundry (and our relationship) one checkmark at a time

BY ELLE WARREN

This past fall, my wife and I were soon to host my family at our new apartment in Chicago, but our sink was full of dishes, our laundry hamper overflowed, and countertops and side tables were littered with the everyday clutter of life. On the Saturday morning before my family was set to arrive, my wife and I looked at each other and sighed.

"I'll take care of the kitchen if you vacuum and declutter," my wife said. I agreed.

The mad-dash cleaning spree that ensued was not unlike many others we'd had before, which is what led us, a couple months later, to dream up the seemingly simple solution of making a chore chart.

But allow me to rewind. When my wife and I first moved in together a few years before, I was high on domestic bliss and homemaking, happy to take charge in keeping our apartment clean. Then, over time, I noticed a new feeling crop up: the slow leak of resentment. It wasn't so much that I resented her right then, but rather, I felt positive that if I, the less messy between us, continued to bear the brunt of keeping our space tidy, I would one day feel resentful.

Committed to the longevity of our relationship, I stopped being so diligent in my initiative. I still did chores, but I no longer wanted to carry the weight of keeping our home. There's often a perception of sapphic relationships that housework, without the shackles of gender roles, is automatically equal — but we are still different people with different ways of being.

At the time, my wife was a teacher. She's an introvert, and each work day left her depleted. Each weekend was spent recovering. In the years that followed, we existed in a sort of

"There's often a perception of sapphic relationships that housework, without the shackles of gender roles, is automatically equal — but we are still different people with different ways of being."

feast-or-famine state when it came to housework. We'd fall behind — the dishes, the laundry, the clutter — and then, overwhelmed and fed



up, we'd spend a weekend frantically cleaning. We moved about in frustration, less frustrated at one another than at us, as a unit.

It was a few years into this cycle when my wife came up with the idea of a weekly check-in in which we'd discuss, among other things, what

needed to be done around the house and who was going to do it. This was the first, less formal iteration of the chore chart. For a little while, it helped. But then, we'd miss a meeting for one reason or another, or forget who said they'd do which chores. We eventually jumped into planning a wedding and a cross-

country move (events I would not recommend doing simultaneously), and our weekly check-ins fell by the wayside altogether.

After the wedding and the move, while we hoped to bask in the joy of newly wedded bliss, life continued

See **Chore Chart**, page 24

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When Pleasure Becomes a Protest: The Fight Over Who Gets to Enjoy Sex

How queer sex lives thrive in private spaces



BY DANI LAMORTE

"It is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality," wrote Gayle Rubin, University of Michigan anthropology and women's studies associate professor, in her 1984 essay "Thinking Sex."

Flash forward to Aidan Maese-Czeropski, once an aide for former Sen. Ben Cardin,

having sex in 2023. You might have heard about it: He was in a Senate hearing room with another man and, with his help, recorded the action to share in a private online group.

When a right-wing outlet leaked Maese-Czeropski's video, the question was raised: Did Maese-Czeropski, by having consensual sex with another consenting adult, do something criminal? Although U.S. Capitol Police determined there was "no evidence that a crime was committed," he lost his job

all the same.

I think Maese-Czeropski wanted to be seen as a sexual person, a person having actual gay sex. He wanted to show us his thrills and pleasures. News stories and community chatter made him seem like an outlier, but I don't think that's true. As does Alex, who discussed this very thrill with me (and along with our other sources, requested anonymity).

"Public play at the beach or club, frequenting bathhouses, these are all big

sexual triggers for me," he tells me.

In 2019, Alex exited a long-term straight relationship and began exploring his sexuality both in-person and online, including via an "alt" — or "alternative account" — on X and Bluesky.

"The alt provides that in smaller doses — allowing me to share some of those experiences with more people, but also taking experiences that would otherwise be private and making them public."

Alt accounts can be anonymous or identifiable and can serve as places to share homemade sexual content or repost content from elsewhere. An alt is complementary to a “main” — an account used for everyday, less-explicitly sexual purposes.

“When I share a nude of myself and I see other accounts liking, commenting, resharing, I say to myself ‘Yeah, I’ve still got it,’” explains Matt about his alt account.

Chris maintains a private alt, accessible only to those who follow him. It assures him of mutual interest between himself and those who look, but it also addresses an ethical question.

“My alt is locked, so I have a bit of control over who sees the content. This means that there is a real ethos of consent — everyone who sees what I post wants to see it. I appreciate that the boundaries are clear and the purpose of why we’re all there is intentional.”

As in most environments — from the grocery store to the gynecologist’s office — boundary-crossing is not uncommon on social media. A quick browse on Bluesky, however, shows that most interactions between alt accounts are appreciative, respectful and hot.

But if you ask the authors of Project 2025, these accounts are dangerous.

“Pornography has no claim to First Amendment protection and its purveyors are child predators and misogynistic exploiters of women,” the Project 2025 website claims. “Their product is as addictive as any illicit drug and as psychologically destructive as any crime.”

Pornography can be misogynistic and violent, Rubin concurs in a 1993 essay, but there’s nothing about pornography that is inherently more misogynistic and violent than, say, “Law & Order: SVU.” Likewise, daytime television can be disrespectful of children’s autonomy and personhood. Myself, I’m pretty creeped out by the Charmin commercial where the mother bear checks to see how well her cubs wipe their butts while away from home. What sets porn apart from other kinds of media is sex.

In “Thinking Sex,” Rubin argues that our “culture always treats sex with suspicion.” We view sexual pleasure as different from the pleasures of “food, fiction or astronomy” and, as a result, “erotic behavior is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established.” Generally, sex has to be about love or reproduction to be considered completely good. Sex outside these boundaries — especially gay sex, masturbation and fetish sex — is considered corrosive to society.

Sex isn’t always what you think it is,

either. For instance, Project 2025 groups pornography with “transgender ideology”—a dogwhistle term that collapses trans life and medical transitions into a political problem. Project 2025 treats medical transitions as inherently pornographic and — following their general anti-sex stance — dangerous to society.

In the context of all this, I bring up “the alt” because it’s a small place where sex is enjoyed outside the promise of betrothal or babies. It’s a thing about which someone’s

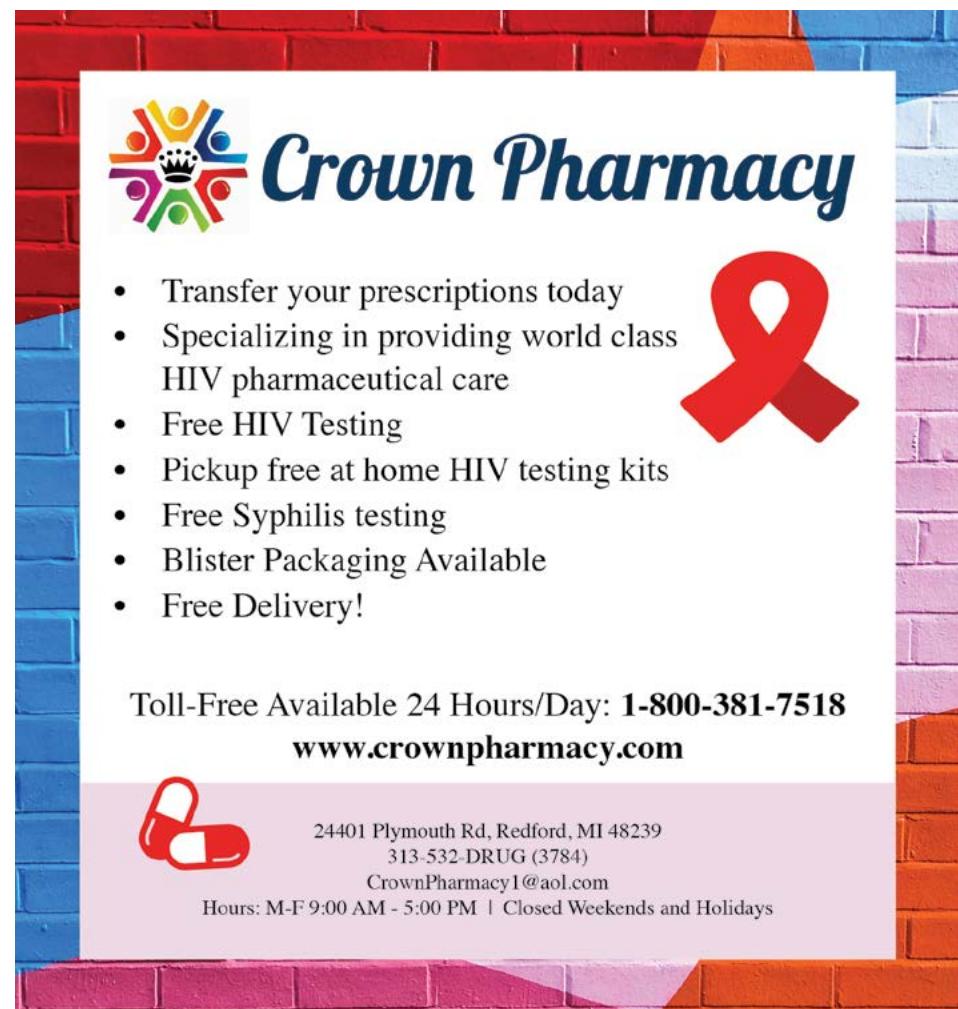
“Sex may not be identical to other pleasures in life, but it’s also not a contaminant introduced into an otherwise pure and ‘normal’ life. It is part of ‘normal’ life. ”

likely to “become dangerously crazy.” And when they do get crazy, it matters how the rest of us respond.

When the Senate hearing room video began to circulate, some opined that Maese-Czerposki had screwed the gays over. Conservatives are always convinced we’re up to something and now they claimed to have proof. While I’m sympathetic to the fears at the root of this argument, I think it caves to a deceptive conservative idea: that having sex, and letting people see you having sex, is wrong. Notably, there was limited public backlash against the leaking of Maese-Czerposki’s private video. In American politics, porn is acceptable only if it’s used to punish someone else.

Sex may not be identical to other pleasures in life, but it’s also not a contaminant introduced into an otherwise pure and “normal” life. It is part of “normal” life. As politically conservative forces work to impose anti-sex policies, and to conflate gender transition with sex, Rubin’s words become more and more important.

I’m not sure it’s possible to be completely sane about something as powerful as sex (or food, for that matter), but we can at least stay alert for delusions of shame. We can, to borrow from Rubin, examine our preconceptions, update our sexual educations and recognize the politics of talking, having or showing sex.



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How a Gay Detroit Bakery Owner Paved His Own Path and Opened the City's First Filipino Bakery

For Jonathan Peregrino, he's 'happy and humbled' to represent the gay Filipino population

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

When Jonathan Peregrino set out to open his bakery, JP Makes and Bakes in Detroit, he knew one thing for sure: He was going to do it his way.

For the 42-year-old bakeshop owner and Food Network alum, that meant working in a small space with a small team — five employees, plus himself. It also meant creating a diverse, rotating menu of items that reflect what he loves to eat and bake, drawing inspiration from his childhood. The personal touch he has added to JP Makes and Bakes since it opened in October, thanks to a \$60,000 Motor City Match grant to purchase equipment, extends to his relationship with customers. There's a reason why orders can only be made in-store, not online or over the phone.

"I want to be able to talk to people," Peregrino tells BTL about prioritizing customer relationships as more than just business as usual. He adds that he wants to "explain what I'm doing, explain the food if they have questions, and just do this my way."

JP Makes and Bakes is Detroit's first and only Filipino bakery, and Peregrino says the treats he creates represent him and his upbringing as a first-generation Filipino American. Peregrino was born in California and grew up on the West Coast after his parents moved to the States in the late '70s.

Though his recipes may not always align with traditional Filipino ingredients or appearances, they are authentically reflective of his background.

"I was more exposed to the Filipino bakeries there, or the recipes that my mom and my



Jonathan Peregrino at his newly opened bakery, JP Makes and Bakes. Courtesy photo

"I'm happy and humbled to be there and to be a representative for these communities that I am part of. But it wasn't what my goal was. "

— Jonathan Peregrino

grandma had," he says. "Some of those recipes had to be converted, though, because they didn't have access to some of the traditional ingredients."

For example, when traditional recipes would use rice flour, he would often substitute all-

purpose flour or dairy milk instead of coconut milk. This approach, blending familiar flavors with practical adjustments, has carried through to his bakery.

Though the menu is continually evolving, Peregrino keeps what he calls the "core six" items available daily. These include pandesal (a lightly sweetened plain roll), pan de coco (pandesal filled with coconut), ube cookies and brownies, his take on the traditional bibingka cake (sometimes filled with blueberries or chocolate chips for a twist) and pan de everything — a version of

pandesal filled with cream cheese and topped with "everything bagel" seasoning.

"That is very much a hybrid recipe because it's definitely not something I grew up eating or in that context. But eating these rolls growing up, I would eat it with cream cheese as a snack, and combining that all into one is something that a lot of Filipinos aren't used to, but it also makes sense to me," he says.

When it comes to new Makes and Bakes menu items, as long as a recipe makes sense to him, Peregrino will try it. "I'm not going to do anything I don't want to do and won't be proud of," he says.

He also promises a rotating cake

slice for customers every day. His reasoning is simple: "because I love cake."

It wasn't just his love for cake that got him here, though. It was his time at pastry school in the Philippines and several other roles: head baker at Tapped Coffee and Craft Beverages in Canton, pastry sous chef at Oak & Reel in Detroit, and even as a competitor on Food Network's "Holiday Baking Championship" in 2020.

"I was the very first one cut; it was the very first season. They did a cut during the very first mini-challenge. I didn't know what was going on and made a few mistakes," Peregrino says.

Still, he says his time on the show

was monumental for pushing him to follow his dream, and it was "a great experience that I wouldn't take back." Plus, he made a few friends. One of them was another gay contestant, Jeff Gray, who even came up to Michigan from Atlanta to visit Peregrino and his bakery after it opened. Looking back, Peregrino says he would like the opportunity to do something like it again.

"I hope to go back on a show one of these days," he says. "I know that what I showed on that show wasn't anywhere near my capabilities and I'm a much different pastry chef now than I was back then."

At the core of his journey is a simple desire: "I just am really hoping to expose people to a variety of baked goods that might not have been accessible to them before," Peregrino says.

Peregrino's friend Kari Paine describes him as "stubborn and determined, in the best way."

"That is just his personality to the core, he will always be true to himself," Paine says.

The two met in 2016 at a CrossFit gym, where Peregrino was a fitness coach while also working a corporate job in sales. At the time,

he was baking in his spare time — a passion he hadn't yet pursued professionally.

"He would bring trays of cookies into the gym. We'd be doing our workouts, then eat cookies afterward, which is hilarious," Peregrino recalls.

"We encouraged him to do more [baking], which was partially self-serving, for sure, because we got lots of treats," Paine admits. But she believes this post-workout cookie club helped Peregrino. "Baking was like an antidote to him," she says, helping balance the demands of his corporate job.

Peregrino says he always knew he would end up in the food industry somehow, and his sales and business experience actually helped him make it a reality.

"As I began to work through the business, writing the plans for opening the bakery, I was able to draw from that experience. From the presentations I've done, I'm able to explain myself more and be the face of the business. I also feel like I have a great background on knowing many of the business aspects and having the passion for food and baking," says Peregrino.

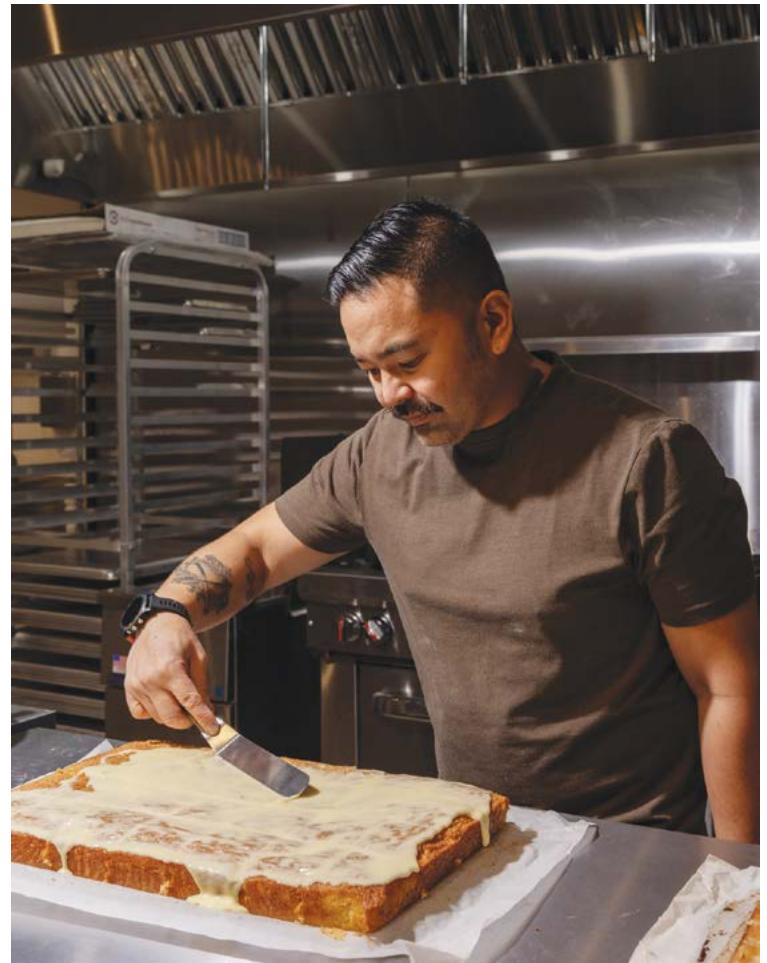
And once he fully committed

to baking full-time, Paine says it was clear this was his calling, despite his 15-year career in sales. She believes Peregrino's journey mirrors the experience of coming out as a queer person.

"It's so cool to see that he's doing something that is incredibly demanding, but it's so fulfilling. I feel like as queer people, it's this beautiful parallel to coming into your own, and coming out and living your truth — and how it is harder objectively in so many ways, but it's so much better as a whole," Paine says.

While Peregrino is grateful that JP Makes and Bakes serves as a haven for both the queer and Filipino communities, he emphasizes that the bakery's opening wasn't about "checking boxes" of representation.

"I'm happy and humbled to be there and to be a representative for these communities that I am part of. But it wasn't what my goal was," says Peregrino. "My plan was all about having a bakery and doing the types of food that I love to make and to eat, and just representing me. But I guess in representing me, it's representing the Filipino and the queer communities at the same time."



Jonathan Peregrino preparing the day's baked goods at JP Makes and Bakes. Courtesy photo

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Melissa Etheridge: 'Be the Example'

The gay icon talks touring with the Indigo Girls and her no 'Fs to give' mentality in the Trump era

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

To quote Melissa Etheridge, ain't it heavy? For some perspective on recent assaults on LGBTQ+ rights brought by the Trump administration, turning to a gay icon with decades of experience in resilience and unity is always worthwhile.

Enter Etheridge, who tells me she's not quite the grandmother she once imagined herself becoming — though, in many ways, she is a grandmother to many of us in the LGBTQ+ community. Our community draws inspiration from her strength, activism and the unwavering fortitude she's embodied since her highly public coming out in 1993. Through the unapologetic truth expressed in her music and embodied in her public persona, Etheridge's voice has consistently carried a message of hope and authenticity.

For Etheridge, the stage is more than a place for entertainment — it's a platform for healing and connection. Currently on tour, she'll soon embark on what is bound to be one of the queerest tours of 2025, a co-headlining run with the Indigo Girls that kicks off in Colorado in July (they're heading to Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre at Freedom Hill on Aug. 26 — tickets are on sale now). Her message remains clear: through joy, music and inclusion, we can weather life's storms together.

I caught up with Etheridge, 63, during a particularly trying week, as the L.A. fires left her and many others reeling. Power outages at her home almost forced her to reschedule our interview, but she and her wife, Linda Wallem, eventually found refuge at a hotel in Santa Barbara.

In this candid conversation, Etheridge opens up about the transformative power of rebuilding, her long history with the Indigo Girls and shares lessons learned from decades of being a trailblazer. She also teases new music inspired by both personal and global experiences.

We've connected throughout the years through some challenging times. I can't imagine what you're feeling right now.

Well, we are right on the edge. We're in Calabasas, so that's on the edge of the Palisades fire, and so my house is going to be fine. Our



Melissa Etheridge. Courtesy of Primary Wave

power's up. We did evacuate, but my house is going to be fine. To know that the Palisades are gone, it is just like, ah. It doesn't hit my head, and this is my city. This is where I eat. Restaurants I eat at once a month, they're gone. And it's overwhelming. I know it will come back so beautifully, and so I know it's going to be a good thing in the long, beautiful run as change is, but man, this is devastating. This is crazy.

Where do you go in your head in a time like this? Do you turn to music?

My wife and I were talking last night because we're up in Santa Barbara — we got away far enough and we're safe and OK — and then you turn on the news and you see it, and you can't go backwards now. There is no backwards anymore. It's not there. And when we think, wow, moving ahead, this is a city that was built on dreamers and their dreams. It was built to entertain the world. It grew because it was a place of dreams and hopes, and change and newness, and it's quite a large industry now there, and a beautiful city that's grown around it filled with many different industries. And I think this event and this change is going to influence what you see in the arts, in theater, television, sports.

I think in 10 years, we'll look back and see how the change that came out of this happened because it takes little petty conversations about liberal and conservative and just throws that out the window. This little tug of war we've been involved in the last 10 years or whatever, it really blows that out, and it's like, "Wow, as we move forward now, let's make sure the institutions we create and the housing and the infrastructure is what we've been spouting all these years." That it's a forward-thinking, diversified, embracing kind of city we want to build.

There's no other way to rebuild but to unify.

Exactly.

Well, it feels almost awkward to talk to you about work. I know for me, it's good to go into my writing head in difficult times, so maybe that's also good for you.

That's exactly what I did. I'm about to record my next album and I'm going into the studio in March, and so I've been really writing and just soaking everything in. And last night, all of a sudden, I was like, "Oh god, I want to write

a song about this experience." But then it's like, "Where do you start?" And I think I need to absorb this experience a little bit. I wouldn't be surprised if there was a song about Los Angeles or Hollywood.

How did you and the Indigo Girls, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, decide on "Yes We Are" as the name of this tour?

Well, we did about 11 shows last year. It was part of my tour and their tour, and we worked it out, and we had such a blast together. We caught up. We loved the audience. The audience that came to see us was on fire. They were enthusiastic. It was very cathartic, like, god, everything we've been going through, let's just remember the songs we love. Remember the songs that made us feel good, and we just soaked it in. And it was multi-generational, that's what I loved.

There were daughters with their mothers, with their grandmothers. The whole family would come, the husbands' wives. Of course, it was very queer, but it wasn't exclusively queer at all. There were a lot of straight folks out there listening to that music they liked in the '90s.

What conversations went into the name of the tour between you and the girls?

It was just a few texts sent back and forth. And I was like, "I don't know, 'Power of Three,' maybe?" And actually my manager said, "What do you think about 'Yes We Are'?" I thought, "Oh, that's just a reference to me." But Emily said, "Oh my god, I love Yes We Are." And we both were enthusiastic about it, and we love the way it feels and what it brings back.

What do you remember from first meeting the Indigo Girls?

My first album [in 1988] was out when I met them, and their big album wasn't out yet. And I remember they were such fans. They were just really, really sweet. Someone brought them over to my house once they knew them. I didn't know who they were, and it wasn't until I listened to them and went, "Oh, this is great." I wore that "Closer to Fine" album out. It was a staple of that time, and I just loved seeing everything they did. It was just a really special time back then.

There were so few out queer people in the '80s when you initially met. Did you bond over all being gay public figures?

Yes, and we both came from that deep women's culture, lesbian culture and women's music festivals. They came from the Southern coalition. I came from Southern California, the San Francisco kind of lesbian, gay, bi [world]. AIDS had really brought us all together. They were a big part of pretty much just the indie music movement that was coming out of Athens, Georgia at the time with R.E.M. So it was a very musically driven time and they just happened to be gay.

I always tell people that the late '80s and early '90s was, "Don't ask, don't tell." We were all out, but we just didn't cross that line publicly where we were saying, "I'm gay" until I finally did in 1993. We were more political, not so much about gay, but about women's rights. And we did a lot of reproductive rights stuff back then with [women's liberation activist] Gloria Steinem. So then the gay thing just developed, and we just followed the path.

It's hard to believe that you came out over three decades ago. I have

memories of seeing you just shortly after I came out and thinking, "Who is this cool lesbian? I want to be this cool lesbian." So, if someone brings back Lilith Fair, I am there.

[Laughs.] Oh, well, sit tight.

Oh, really?

Who knows?

All right, we'll leave it at that. Thinking back to your activism in the '90s, did you think this is where we would be as an LGBTQ+ community in 2025? And how do you think you can bridge music and activism at this point in your career?

I remember speaking in 1994 about gay marriage, and it was a very foreign idea. It was just a weird thing to even say. And even in the gay community, we never even thought about marriage because we weren't going to marry. It just wasn't possible. Then the whole LGBTQ+ community went, "Wait a minute, I deserve that too. That's right, I'm part of this 'we the people.' Hey, wait a minute." The community came together behind that. As we grew up, we were all partying, having a really good time in the '80s, but all of a sudden we're like, "Oh, we want to settle down and have families."

I always used to say, in the future, I think I'll be telling my grandchildren — which I don't have yet, so not yet — "Wow, back when I was your age, they didn't even let us get married." That sort of thing. And how strange they would think it was.

There is now a queer uprising happening in reaction to the current administration. What do you say to young queer activists having seen so much yourself, especially the ones who may think they're fighting for

something that is a new fight?

Well, is it a new fight? Is it or not? Because I think what's always considered is, "Hey, I just want to be considered one of the many," and this idea of "all of us — except for them," is being tried in our society. That's what we're really saying, because people can't even understand the many different layers and differences in our own community. So it's just not even, "Give us these things, stop taking away these things, stop taking away the protections that you would give any other human being."

We are just human beings, and it's showing what being human means. And so I would encourage the activists now, people in the

“The night of the election, I went, ‘That’s it, I am not even going to pay attention to him anymore. I’m not going to give him any of my fear, any of my disappointment. I’m not going to give any of that anymore.’”

LGBTQ+ community, to work for something and not against something. It's when we work against it that we give more energy to it than it deserves, so let's work for inclusion. Let's work for unity. And let's be an example of being a unified community ourselves, who may say, "Look, I don't understand some things, but being a human being is a right. And you can make whatever choice you want, whether it's to change your gender identity or to be a Republican and hate. I give you that. You have the right to do that." And it's very hard, but let's be the example of that. Accepting and loving ourselves is the example. Let's show how that looks, and that's the best thing we can do to work for and fight for inclusion.

How do you feel about Trump leading the country for the next four years?

I don't have any more Fs to give. The night of the election, I went, "That's it, I am not even

going to pay attention to him anymore. I'm not going to give him any of my fear, any of my disappointment. I'm not going to give any of that anymore."

How do you plan on accomplishing that?

Well, I limit my social media time, and I stopped giving my attention to him and the weird ideology. I give my attention to things that bring me joy, to things that give me hope. Like I was saying, I want to be the example. And when I'm afraid of things that I have no control of, that's a horrible way to feel.

So start by taking care of myself. Start by giving the understanding and attention and love that I wish they would give. I'm going to give it to myself and everyone I see. I'm going to, again, be an example of what I wish to see in the world.

I was listening to your song "What Happens Tomorrow" shortly after Kamala Harris lost to Trump. It feels as relevant now as it did when you released it in 2007.

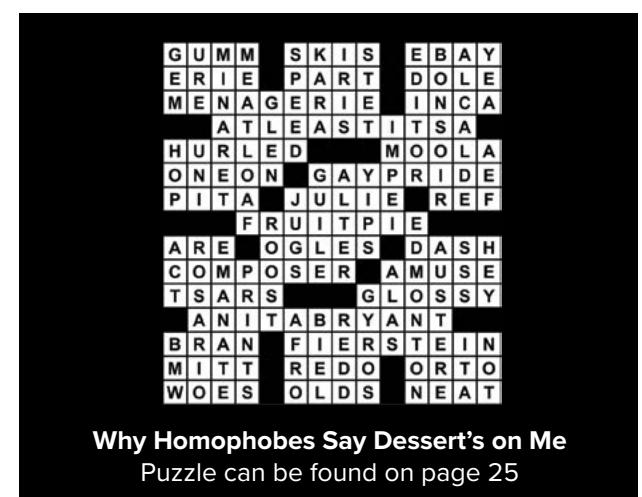
Unfortunately, and that's all these years later, right? I wrote that song and I didn't know when it might ever *not* be relevant.

Regarding your upcoming tour with the Indigo Girls, you both have extensive catalogs. How are you approaching the setlist?

I think I might be dipping into some of the more hopeful songs on my repertoire — not being afraid to be political, but to do it in a way that inspires.

I think a lot of people are looking forward to experiencing some community in a space where they feel loved and accepted.

Absolutely. Please, please, because it's a safe space. It's a loving space. And again, we're not there pushing against a lot of stuff. We are showing love and inclusion, and really how we still feel joy and hope, and it's still alive, and come sing the songs with us.



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1 Chore Chart

Continued from page 17

to be chaotic. I lost my job a couple weeks after our wedding, and then, a few months later, I was diagnosed with two large ovarian cysts requiring surgical removal. I had stretches of days where I was barely able to go from the couch to the bathroom, let alone do chores. My wife tried her best to hold things together, but between working full-time, caring for me and our three cats, we entered another famine state with our space.

Toward the end of December, as I still hadn't undergone surgery but was feeling better, we decided that, in 2025, we had to do something different. Having chaos in our environment only compounded the chaos of our lives — and as a cherry on top, it wasn't a conducive environment for romance, either. We'd both reached a breaking point. "2025 is the year we figure this out," we agreed.

So we decided to create a chore chart, one that we would see every day, and which took the guesswork out of who would do what and when. We needed routine, structure and consistency. Newly married and entering our late 20s, it was, to put it simply, time to get it together.

My wife took 10 minutes to draw the chore chart with a dry-erase marker on our refrigerator. There are daily tasks, weekly tasks and monthly ones. For almost a month,

we've diligently — albeit, not perfectly — completed our chores and placed X's in all the boxes. It's simple — silly, even — but the difference it's made in our home, our lives and our relationship was obvious from the jump and left me saying, "I can't believe we lived that way for so long."

We are now equal partners in keeping our home. There is no question about who is responsible for what. There's no pressure for one of us to take on more than the other, because we've already agreed on who will do what. But if one of us happens to be flying through her chores or finds herself with more energy, we can help the other out because we want to, not because we're frustrated or resentful. The chore chart gives us built-in opportunities to show appreciation for one another, too.

"I'm so proud of us," my wife said one day in mid-January as she placed a few X's on her half of the chart. I'm proud of us, too. Sticking to the chore chart is a habit we'll have to continue to work at and refine, but we end each day grateful to be gifting ourselves an orderly space, a soft place to land.

Elle Warren is a Midwestern writer covering grief, OCD, queerness and other historically taboo topics for outlets like The Guardian, HuffPost, Business Insider and beyond. Find her on Instagram and TikTok at @ellewarrenwrites.

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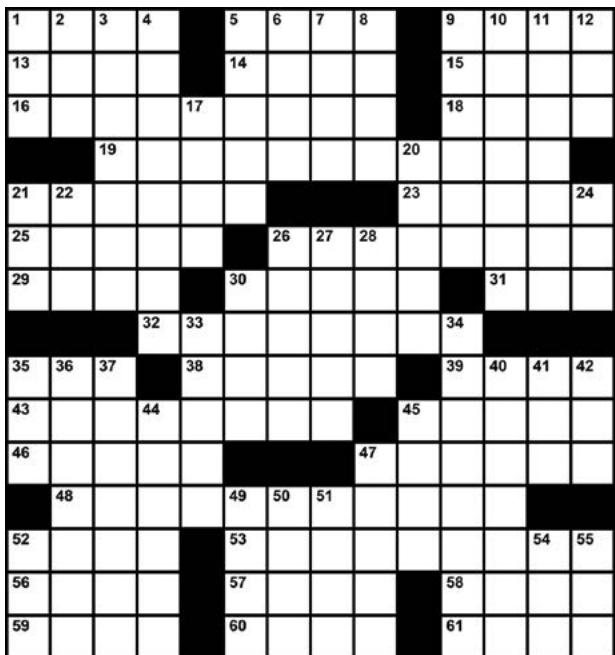
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1 Garland, at birth
5 Biathlete's slats
9 Auction web site
13 Lake of Ohio ferries
14 Say "So Long, Farewell"
15 Pass out
16 Williams' glass animals

18 Peru native
19 Start of what 48-Across said when a gay rights activist threw a dessert in her face
21 Pitched, in Billy Bean's game
23 Do-re-mi
25 Tie ___ (party hardy)
26 A rainbow flag symbolizes this
29 Edible pocket
30 Mary Poppins portrayer Andrews
31 New York Liberty game

Down

1 Masterpiece
2 Moist ending
3 Tower of Rumi's religion
4 "Bat Out of Hell" singer
5 Geert Blanchart's kind of skating
6 "Idol" judge DioGuardi
7 "The Unicorn" author Murdoch
8 Leave as is
9 Linda Villarosa, for one
10 Yves' evening utterance
11 Frida's mayor

See p. 23 for answers

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12 Word before verily, in the King James
32 End of the quote
35 "We ___ Family"
38 Enjoys the scenery at a gay bar
39 Bit of salt, for Stephen Pyles
43 Benjamin Britten, for one
45 Tickle a funny bone
46 Old Russian despots
47 Like patent leather
48 Singer turned antigay crusader (1940-2025)
52 Gift for your regular date?
53 Harvey, of "Torch Song Trilogy"
56 Fly catcher
57 What "let" means to Martina
58 ___ take arms against a sea of troubles"
59 Feelings of hitting rock bottom
60 Cutlass, e.g.
61 Straight, in a bar



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Trump Orders

Continued from page 10

moving to the next town or the next state."

What this means for our community

While these orders are undeniably alarming, it's crucial to understand that many of these changes won't happen overnight. Implementation will take time, and you can bet there will be legal challenges every step of the way. Our community has faced similar attacks before, and we've always responded with resilience and unity.

Lambda Legal issued a statement reading, in part, "We are exploring every legal avenue to challenge these unlawful and unconstitutional actions. This is not only about politics and ideology — but also about real people's lives. To combat these attacks, we are launching our 'Fearless + Fighting Back' campaign because our community will not be erased, and Lambda Legal will never stop fighting for justice. In the next

four years, we may not be able to litigate every odious anti-LGBTQ policy change, but rest assured, attacks on our communities will not go unanswered."

"We stand ready to fight alongside our colleagues who likewise are standing up for justice to ensure no one is left behind," the statement continued.

Michigan LGBTQ+ leaders respond

Openly bisexual Rep. Laurie Pohutsky emphasized the gravity of the situation, telling BTL, "Trump's attacks on the trans community are as terrifying as they are calculated, and it's important that we stay focused on preparing ourselves and fighting back at every available opportunity."

Czach notes these orders compel federal agencies to take actions that conflict with both constitutional protections and existing federal law. "That said, the practical consequences could be far-reaching, from the disruption we've seen with people's ability to get accurate identification documents like passports, to undermining crucial

non-discrimination protections, and opening people up to harassment, humiliation and intimidation," she added. "Affirmations remains steadfast in our commitment to fight for our community and to maintain a safe, welcoming and affirming environment."

Angela Gabridge, executive director of MiGen, refuses to retreat. "There is an effort underway to identify any project, program, grant or organization engaged in what the Federal government considers 'DEI' work, and to claw back or end any federally sourced funding they receive," she noted. "At MiGen, we have had to build and fund an organization dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ older adults almost entirely outside of the traditional funding system... That said, it does not mean we will not lose funding."

Gabridge said that, at first, she considered whether it would be wise for the organization to dial back on its typically bold, authentic messaging to Michigan's older LGBTQ+ community. "I found myself mentally bargaining and thinking maybe we can soften some language, update our website, go lavender instead of rainbow... but you know, I don't think we're going

to do that. I don't see how we do that and remain true to ourselves and who we serve."

What you can do now

- Stay informed but don't panic.** Many of these changes will face significant legal hurdles before implementation.
- Keep your current documents safe.** If you've been considering updating any federal documentation, consult with LGBTQ+ legal resources about timing.
- Connect with advocacy organizations like the ACLU and Lambda Legal.** They'll be leading the charge in challenging these measures. And donate if you can.
- Support one another.** Our community's greatest strength has always been our ability to come together in the face of adversity. Visit Affirmations, Stand with Trans, MiGen and other local LGBTQ+ resources in person or attend an online support group.

Remember, we've weathered similar storms before. From Stonewall to the AIDS crisis to marriage equality, our community has faced seemingly insurmountable challenges and emerged stronger. This moment calls for that same resilience, unity and determination to fight for our right to exist and thrive authentically.

Our history shows that hate doesn't win in the long run. While these orders represent a serious challenge, it's also a reminder of why we must continue fighting for true equality and recognition. The path forward may be difficult, but our community has never backed down from a fight for our rights and dignity.

Local leaders like Gabridge are showing up for the community unequivocally. "We press on and hope that our allies in state government, private philanthropy and the corporate sector continue to see us and stand with us," Gabridge said. "Our folks have earned the right to 'Age Out Loud' and to be exactly who they are; the least we can do is continue to stand alongside them. We're not going back in the closet."



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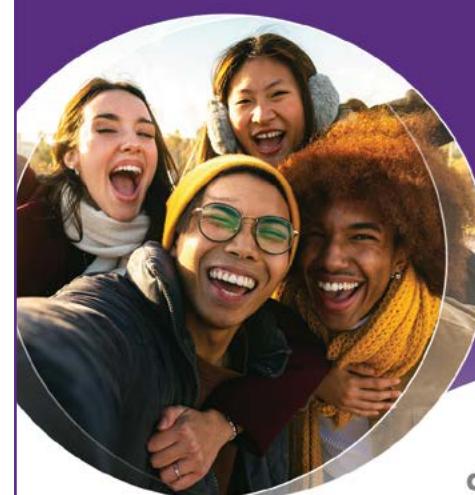


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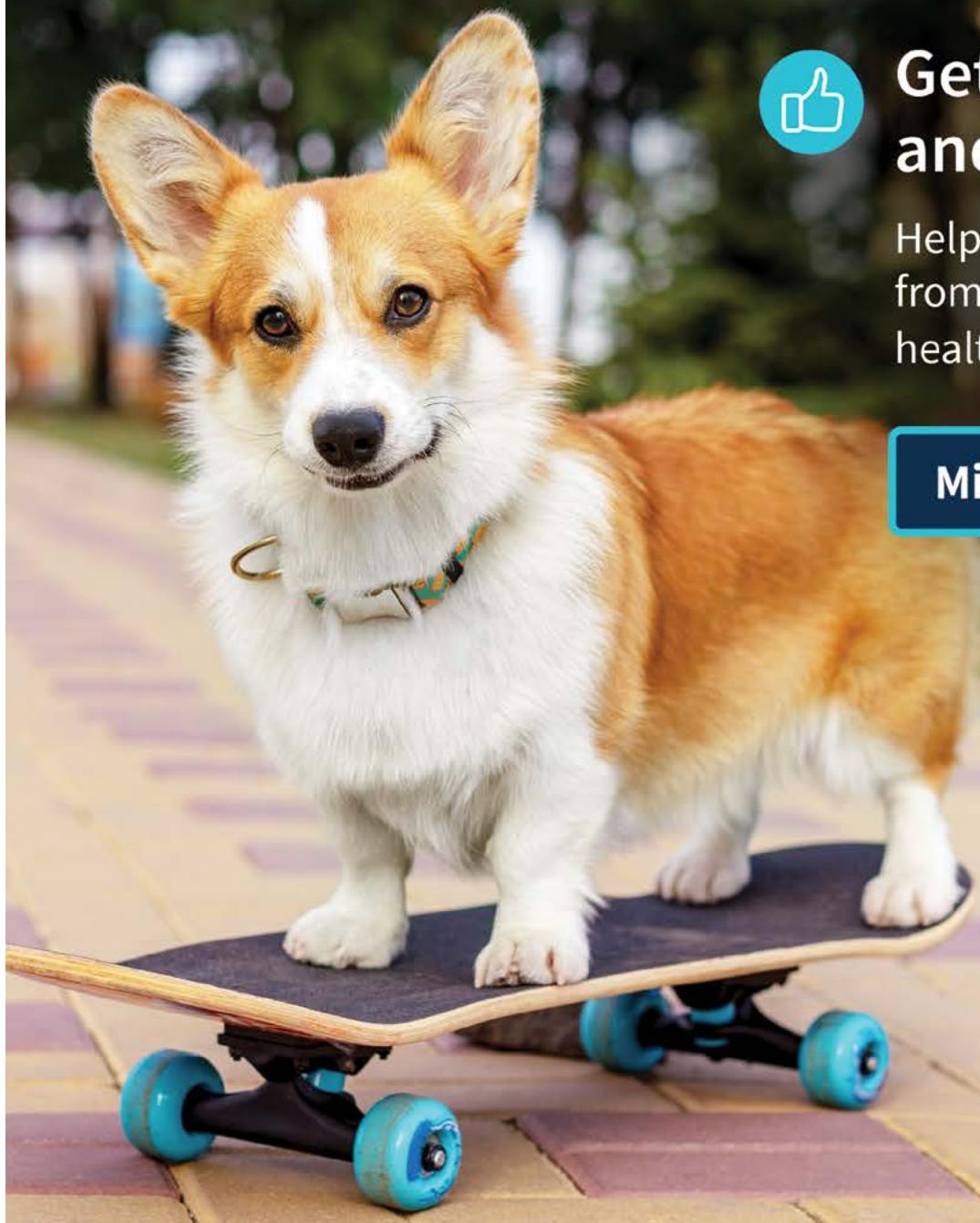
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